

2006

# The Anthropology Rebranding Project: Does American anthropology have a "branding" problem?

Tunstall, Elizabeth (Dori)

---

## **Suggested citation:**

Tunstall, Elizabeth (Dori) (2006) The Anthropology Rebranding Project: Does American anthropology have a "branding" problem? *Anthropology News*, 47 (8). p. 17. ISSN 15416151  
Available at <http://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/1280/>



From November 15–19, 2006, the AAA will meet in the San José McEntery Convention Center under the theme “Critical Intersections/Dangerous Issues.” As association members, committees, sections and staff do the work of organizing sessions and planning the program, check this space for news about the meeting venue, issues and concerns, planned events and other discussion related to the meeting and its theme.

## The Anthropology Rebranding Project

### Does American Anthropology Have a “Branding” Problem?

ELIZABETH (DORI) TUNSTALL  
U ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

What is branding you ask? If you walked down a street and did a random survey of people with the question, “When I say the word ‘anthropology,’ what is your gut reaction?” the answers that you get would be the brand of American anthropology.

In 2005, a group of 10 anthropologists and designers asked that question to their colleagues and cataloged the anthropology headlines of the *NY Times*. The result of their very preliminary studies was a sense that the popular perceptions of anthropology are of a field engaged in the scientific study of primitive peoples (exoticism) or the distant past (dirt, bones and Indiana Jones). While perhaps an accurate image of anthropology in the past, the anthropology of today is more diverse in practitioners, approaches and topics than ever.

Yet our informal interviews and surveys suggest the continued perception of the field as exotics and dirty artifacts has significant impact on its ability to 1) continue to attract and retain the best new anthropology students; 2) retain committed and engaged professional anthropologists; 3) demonstrate the value of its knowledge to business, government and society; and 4) engage the public in meaningful exchanges about what it means to be human.

### The Anthropology Rebranding Project

In response to this branding problem, the Anthropology Rebranding Project was started by a group of individuals who have or are currently conducting ethnographically-based marketing research for large clients. Originally composed of anthropologist/designer pairs, Elizabeth Tunstall/Cheyenne Medina, Nelle Steele/Jenny Lam, Tim Plowman/Lisa Abendroth, Alexandra Mack, Susan Mann/Agatha Wilkowska, and respondents Ken Anderson/Marcia Lausen, the NAPA-supported group presented new messages, logos, marketing concepts and areas of public engagement for the field of anthropology at the 2005 AAA meeting.

This year the group is holding a NAPA-sponsored workshop at the AAA meeting in San José to engage interested individuals in the development of a strategic vision, set of opportunities and roadmap for revitalizing the brand identity of the AAA. The objectives of the workshop are to 1) develop a common understanding of past and current efforts to rebrand the field of anthropology and the AAA; 2) develop an actionable strategy for rebranding the AAA to be able to present to the AAA executive board; and 3) engage a core

team of individuals to work on implementing the project once funding is secured. It takes place Friday, November 17, 2006, from 12:00–1:30 pm in the Blossom Hill 1 room at the San José Marriott. Interested individuals should contact Dori Tunstall at [etunst@uic.edu](mailto:etunst@uic.edu).


### The Rebranding Process

In the process of developing a rebranding project, it helps to be clear that branding is about what people who are not anthropologists think about the field, and if these “external” perspectives do not meet with perspectives internal to anthropology, then it is up to anthropologists to better communicate what it is they are and do, and to address how they need to reframe external perspectives.

The process of branding and marketing that brand involves the following steps: 1) secondary research on trends and evaluation of past efforts; 2) qualitative studies of target audiences to find out key brand impressions of anthropology (what is it, what does it do, what can it do better); 3) quantitative studies to further validate the themes with target audiences to develop profiles, metrics and opportunities; 4) evaluation of marketing channels in terms of effectiveness and return on investment; 5) development of marketing campaign and concepts to share; 6) have the AAA body participate in concept testing and campaign selection; 7) produce the campaign working with creative firms; and 8) roll out the campaign through multiple channels.

### Efforts to Rebrand Anthropology

Some of the past efforts to be reviewed include the Northern Arizona University's video for practicing anthropology programs, the book *Why America's Top Pundits are Wrong* edited by Catherine Besteman and Hugh Gusterson, and the rebranding approaches developed by the group. Elizabeth Tunstall/Cheyenne Medina created a new logo, tagline “Connect to our Humanness,” and a marketing campaign highlighting how the four fields contribute to global soccer. Nelle Steele/Jenny Lam conducted a survey, developed new messaging about how “Rich Understanding + Vital Action = Empowerment,” and designed a new logo.

Tim Plowman/Lisa Abendroth worked on themes very close to *Why America's Top Pundits are Wrong*. Tim Plowman demonstrated how through clarity, experience, accuracy and relevance anthropologists can challenge the pundits. Lisa Abendroth created a digital avatar to serve as the changing messages of anthropology, while allowing actual anthropologists to avoid the camera's glare. In their rebranding approach “Anthropology Goes Global,” Susan Mann/Agatha Wilkowska created a web-based tool that allows people all over the world to upload culturally-relevant data to share in a combination of Google Earth, [myspace.com](http://myspace.com) and the HRAF-Human Relations Area Files. 

*An associate professor of design anthropology at University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), Elizabeth (Dori) Tunstall is the first anthropologist to be hired as full time tenure-track faculty in an American school of art and design.*

## Undergraduate Research in Anthropology

### Students and the Creation of Anthropological Knowledge

AGUSTÍN FUENTES  
DEBORAH L. ROTMAN  
U NOTRE DAME

Undergraduate students are an increasingly important element in the production and dissemination of anthropological knowledge. Yet a substantial bias remains among professionals and academics that students at this level are capable of contributing only to basic data collection, rather than its analysis and interpretation.

This preconception is rooted in the archaic division of research and teaching into isolated spheres and the notion that undergraduate students are too unsophisticated to grasp the

real complexities of “true research.” These perspectives short-change both students, by reducing their participation in the research process, and anthropologists, by excluding a potentially important partner in the process of discovery.

### Support for Undergraduate Research

The importance of undergraduates in research is becoming increasingly underscored via financial support by federal-level agencies, such as the National Science Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Institutes of Health. In addition, there are a growing number of faculty-student collaborations across anthropology departments, particularly in the US. The number of field schools and research programs that involve students in original research is ex-

See *Undergrad Research* on page 18